

KARLA CAMPOS

Fighting for Justice on the Job

Karla started working at American Reclamation during the summer of 2011; she is a 25-year-old single mother, supporting herself and her two children, ages 8 and 10. Karla was a sorter, someone who collects and sorts waste materials passing quickly by on a conveyor belt, to ensure materials are recycled properly. Sorting is a dangerous job in the recycling industry; workers sort through hazardous materials—anything from dead animals to needles, often without proper training or protective equipment. Many sorters say they are issued one pair of gloves, which quickly develop holes because of the glass and sharp objects they sort through. Some say that they receive only one disposable, flimsy painter's mask a week to protect them from breathing in the fumes and dust being released by the waste. Karla says that in her facility workers are frequently breathing in dry wall dust from construction waste that is being broken up. She also reports that even though their facility does not collect biohazardous waste, syringes are a common sight on the sorting line.



"I thought I was going to be trained, at least for a couple of days, or at least see a video, but they just throw you right in... I had to support my children, so I had to take the risk... It's a risk everyday working there."

—Karla Campos

Because of the poor treatment and dangerous conditions Karla and her co-workers faced daily on the job, they decided to start a campaign to unionize. Being afraid for their health and safety, they also filed a complaint with Cal/OSHA in November 2011. Their complaint involved lack of training and receiving improper protective equipment. Because of the severe and imminent hazards at the facility, Cal/OSHA considered the complaint high priority and made their first inspection within two weeks of the filing.

Karla became a leader among her co-workers in the fight for justice and better working conditions, making her a target for the anti-union company. On January 5, 2012, Karla's boss accused her of planting a bucket of syringes on the sorting line to get the company in trouble. The next day Karla slipped while climbing over a pile of trash to get to the one bathroom provided to the workers. She fell and fractured her tailbone; within an hour of this accident, her boss fired her. Giving almost no explanation, the boss alluded to the planted syringes as the cause for her dismissal. Karla and her co-workers feel confident that this firing was an act of retaliation against her because of the leadership role she had taken on in the unionization process. Karla is now out of work; however, she is not giving up. She continues to both lead and inspire her co-workers, actively participating in the ongoing fight to organize. And she is pursuing her legal rights through the Department of Labor Standards Enforcement (DLSE).